

LITTLE ROCK ARKANSAS GAZETTE (AR)  
31 May 1986

# Former CIA analyst says travelers to Russia freer than many believe

By George Wells  
GAZETTE STAFF

You can travel alone in the Soviet Union with more freedom than many Americans believe, even if you know the language, and can mingle with people on trains and at hotels or in the parks.

But of course those people might be from the police or the KGB.

## Saw no signs he was followed

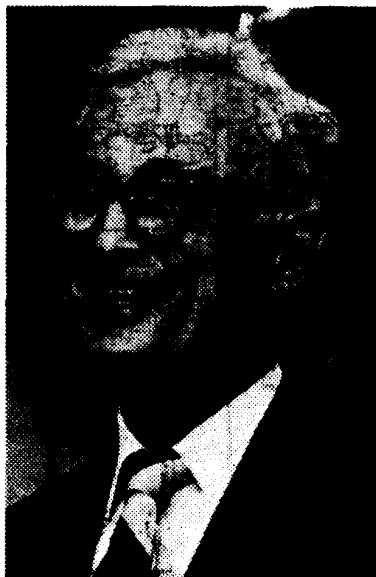
These were some of the impressions of John K. McLean of Alexandria, Va., a former Little Rock resident who worked 11 years for the Central Intelligence Agency as a political analyst. He returned last year from his second trip to Russia and other Communist countries strictly as a tourist and said he saw no evidence of being followed to or in any of the 21 cities he visited.

## Offers impressions of visit

McLean, who speaks Russian, shared his impressions recently with the Little Rock Lions Club at a meeting in the First United Methodist Church. He didn't discuss his CIA work.

One impression: At Novosibirsk, the largest city in Siberia, a young man offered to show him around the city, and did, but when he asked to see the man's apartment, a policeman intervened. McLean said the man told him in parting, "I don't like police."

Another impression: Young people are much more interested than older people in talking to foreigners, sometimes to practice their English and sometimes just to ask questions about rumors or news reports. They seemed to be much less intimidated than older people, and McLean remembered one wearing a T-shirt saying, "Youth for Reagan." He also recalled a Communist Party member telling



—Staff Photo by Gene Prescott  
**JOHN K. McLEAN**

him, "The younger generation is not like us. They don't understand the sacrifices we made during the war."

Everywhere he went, McLean said, there were two basic concerns people expressed. "One was, 'Does President Reagan want war?' and another was a genuine fear of nuclear war," he said.

But the Russians also wanted to know about rumors. A man asked him if Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov was in the United States, as he had heard. Others asked about the truth of news reports in Soviet newspapers and television.

McLean said he talked with a group of 10th graders at Leningrad who told him they didn't believe Soviet newspapers, but did believe Soviet television.

They asked questions, he said, "and they gave very serious attention to the answers you gave."

Also, "Most people impressed me with being interested in making

a living" instead of communism or politics.

## 'Better fed, better dressed'

"The Soviets are better fed and better dressed than I had expected," he said. "I never saw anybody that looked as though they were starving."

He also said he could see people along the route of the Trans Siberian Railway camping beside their cars.

While he was there, McLean said, "they never tried to harass me, but from time to time they'd try to harass the people who wanted to talk to me."

## Advices learning bit of language

He advised anyone thinking about a trip to the Soviet Union to try to learn "at least a little bit of the language" and to travel on an individual basis, "get away from the group."

"I'm convinced we ought to encourage tourist travel and exchanges," he said. "We've got nothing to lose by trying to open up Russia."

How successful that is likely to be is another question, he admitted. "How do you break the grip of the ruling elite?"

## Finds Russians friendly

McLean said he found Russian people everywhere to be friendly, although he noted that he did not meet any "higher-ups." He said there was "a remote possibility of some mellowing [by the Russian government] if we can wait long enough."

McLean, a native of Buffalo, N.Y., was an officer of Commercial National Bank (now First Commercial Bank) for a short time in the 1950s before joining the CIA. His brother, W. H. (Bill) McLean, is a former head of the bank and is on the bank's Board of Directors.